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ABSTRACT

A review of research literature relating to vocational education and training (VET) in non-metropolitan Australia identified issues which differentially impact metropolitan and non-metropolitan Australia and research needs. Findings indicated non-metropolitan Australia is diverse in terms of population density, educational experiences of the population, occupation, and industries for employment. Rural people were less likely to have post-school qualifications, participate in post-school education and training, be employed, and be a professional working in manufacturing, property and business services, or finance and insurance. Rural people were more likely to have left school early, be unemployed or out of the labor force, work in small business, be self-employed or an employer, be a laborer or have other low-skilled occupation, and work in agriculture, forestry and fishing, mining, construction, or tourism. The following seven issues demonstrate differential impact or need further research: local involvement in planning; thin markets; cost of training and measurement of cost and effectiveness; flexible delivery; no tradition of VET or history of valuing education; quality and availability of trainers and assessors; and community sustainability, social capital, and the value of VET to communities. (A 59-item bibliography is appended.) (YLB)

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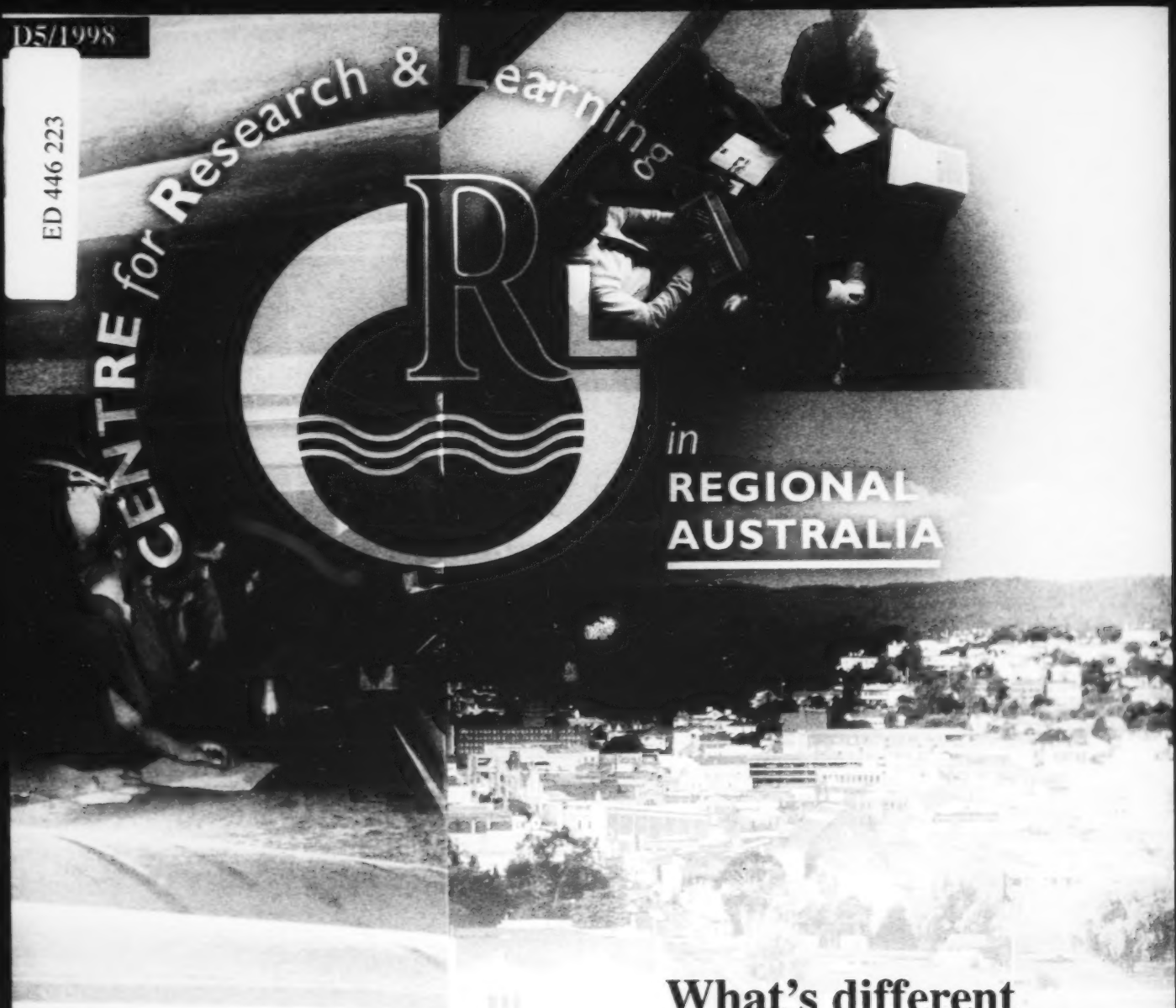


# What's different away from the Rat Race?: Issues for VET in non-metropolitan Australia

*Sue Kilpatrick & Rowena Bell*

**Discussion Paper D5/1998**

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# WHAT'S DIFFERENT AWAY FROM THE RAT RACE?: ISSUES FOR VET IN NON-METROPOLITAN AUSTRALIA

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**Abstract**

*How much do we know about VET outside metropolitan Australia? Analysis of the Australian VET research literature reveals that only a very small proportion of studies have collected data in non-metropolitan Australia. Non-metropolitan Australian labour markets are different to those in the big cities: there are proportionately more small businesses, more managers and more self employed people. The unemployment rate is higher. Manufacturing is under represented, agriculture, forestry and fishing is the biggest employment sector.*

*This paper presents preliminary findings from a review of research literature relating to VET in non-metropolitan Australia, and identification of issues which impact differentially in metropolitan and non-metropolitan Australia. We identify seven issues which appear to impact differentially: local involvement in planning, thin markets, cost of training and measurement of cost and effectiveness, flexible delivery, no tradition of VET or history of valuing education, quality and availability of trainers and assessors, and community sustainability, social capital and the value of VET to communities.*

Paper presented at the AVETRA 1998 Conference

**Paper D5/1998 in the *CRLRA Discussion Paper Series***

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# Introduction

This paper presents preliminary findings from a review of research literature relating to VET in non-metropolitan Australia. The project is on behalf of NCVER. Our brief is to review the literature, identify issues which impact differentially in metropolitan and non-metropolitan Australia and identify areas where more research is needed. Our thanks go to NCVER for permission to present this paper.

The scope of our research review is Australian research articles and reports since 1990. Research relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is the subject of a parallel project, and is excluded from the scope of this paper. This paper is a discussion of work in progress. It is not always yet clear which issues are specifically non-metropolitan, which impact differently on non-metropolitan Australia, and which issues require further research to establish whether there is a differential impact.

There has been very little research conducted on vocational education and training in non-metropolitan Australia. We have identified a body of work which is exclusively related to non-metropolitan Australia, for example studies which consider remote communities and education and training in agriculture. There is another body of work which combines both metropolitan and non-metropolitan data. Very few of these studies report any findings separated on that basis. Studies using data from both sectors tend to report on an Australia-wide or State basis. Much of the non-metropolitan research which does exist relates to curriculum or delivery. There is a smaller body of work on access and equity, and very little on training outcomes.

We are seeking your input today; are there are any pieces of research which we have overlooked, and any issues which are missing? Are the seven issues we identify here the important ones?

# Context

People living and working in rural Australia contribute much to Australia's national economic well-being. At least two-thirds of our exports are generated outside capital cities (Martin, 1996). Some of our major industries including agriculture, mining, forestry and tourism generate all or most of their economic activity outside metropolitan areas. However, perhaps more than in any other time in its history, rural Australia faces a crisis. How does vocational education and training support rural Australia to enable it to contribute to the consolidation and restructuring needed for the Australian economy to move strongly into the 21st century? Rural Australians are less likely to have post-school qualifications than their metropolitan counterparts, and are less likely to participate in vocational education and training.

Rural and remote Australia is taken to be all Australia outside metropolitan areas of 100,000 or more people. A diversity of ages, lifestyles, occupations, aspirations, educational experiences, opportunities, industries and communities

are represented in rural and remote Australia. While there are many similarities between rural and metropolitan Australia, there are also some differences.

## Who lives in rural and remote Australia?

Over 37% of the population live outside metropolitan Australia. Many young people leave rural and remote areas for education, training and employment. This is reflected in the age distribution of Australia's metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, which shows a decline in the number of 15 to 24 year olds in rural and remote Australia matched by an increase in those age groups in metropolitan Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996 Census, unpublished data).

### *Educational experience*

Rural and remote Australians are less likely to have post-school qualifications than those living in metropolitan areas, and less likely to have university level qualifications (see Table 1). Consequently, they are less likely to have previous successful experiences of formal education and training. Literacy performance is strongly linked to educational attainment (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997a). Table 1 below shows that rural and remote Australians are less likely to have post-school qualifications. In contrast to metropolitan Australia, more rural females than males have university and higher level vocational qualifications. A greater proportion of rural males than metropolitan males have skilled vocational qualifications.

**Table 1:** Percentage of population with post-school qualifications

| | Male | | Female | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Post-school qualification** | **Metropolitan** | **Rural & remote** | **Metropolitan** | **Rural & remote** |
| Bachelor degree or higher | 7.5% | 3.8% | 6.7% | 4.1% |
| Associate diploma or diploma | 3.3% | 2.5% | 4.2% | 3.9% |
| Skilled vocational qualification | 10.5% | 12.4% | 1.7% | 1.6% |
| Basic vocational qualification | 1.2% | 1.2% | 2.3% | 2.2% |
| **Total** | 22.6% | 19.9% | 14.8% | 11.9% |

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996 Census, unpublished data.

## Where do they live?

Rural and remote Australians live in communities ranging from isolated stations to regional cities of several tens of thousands. There are 23 major population centres of between 30,000 and 100,000 people, and a further 78 centres with populations between 10,000 and 30,000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996

Census, unpublished data). Of the 37% of Australians who live in non metropolitan Australia, approximately one third live in larger centres (10,000 to 100,000), a third live in smaller communities (1,000 to 10,000) and the remainder are scattered outside these small and large population centres. While there has been a drift to the large metropolitan cities over the last decade, the proportion of the population living outside urban centres has remained constant (Australian Bureau of Statistics, unpublished Census data).

**Where do they work?**

Rural and remote Australians are more likely to work for themselves, and more likely to employ others. They are less likely to be employees than are metropolitan Australians. Many enterprises in rural and remote Australia are small or micro businesses; a larger proportion of the non-metropolitan workforce works in small businesses. A smaller proportion of those who are employed in rural Australia are employed full time (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997b). Unemployment is higher in non-metropolitan areas and a larger proportion not in the labour force points to further 'hidden' unemployment (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996 Census, unpublished data).

People in rural and remote Australia are more likely to be working in agriculture, fishing and forestry; mining; tourism (accommodation, cafes and restaurants); utilities; and construction than metropolitan Australians (see Figure 1). The range of industry available in individual rural and remote locations is less diverse than that located in individual metropolitan locations.

**Figure 1:** Working population by industry

| Industry | Metropolitan | Rural & remote |
|---|---|---|
| **A. Larger proportion in rural and remote** | | |
| Agriculture, forestry & fishing | 0.5% | 11.2% |
| Mining | 0.5% | 2.9% |
| Construction | 6.3% | 7.2% |
| Accommodation, cafes & restaurants | 4.7% | 5.6% |
| **B. Larger proportion in metropolitan** | | |
| Manufacturing | 12.4% | 10.4% |
| Property and business services | 12.0% | 6.7% |
| Health and community services | 10.0% | 9.3% |
| Wholesale trade | 6.4% | 4.9% |
| Finance and insurance | 4.9% | 2.2% |
| Cultural & recreational services | 2.7% | 1.9% |
| Communication services | 2.2% | 1.4% |

Similar proportions: Retail trade, Education, Government admin & defence, Transport and storage, Personal and rural services. Electricity, gas & water supply.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996 Census, unpublished data.

Rural and remote Australians are more likely to work as labourers and related workers and in occupations where there has not been a tradition of vocational education and training, for example transport, farming and service sector jobs, and less likely to be professionals (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996 Census, unpublished data).

### How many participate in education and training?

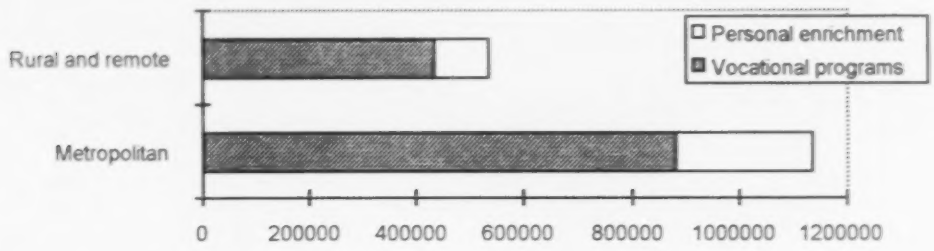
Rural students are less likely to complete secondary school (Lamb 1998). Participation in post-school education and training in rural and remote Australia is lower than in metropolitan Australia. Those rural and remote Australians who do study and train are more likely to be in the vocational education and training sector than the University sector (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996 Census, unpublished data).

Within non-metropolitan Australia there are regions of very high participation and regions of very low participation (NBEET, 1994a).

Within non-metropolitan Australia there are regions of very high participation and regions of very low participation (NBEET, 1994a).

Rural and remote Australians who participate in vocational education and training are more likely to participate in vocational programs than in personal enrichment programs, as defined by NCVER (see Figure 2)

**Figure 2:** Clients in training activities




Source: NCVER (1997)

### *On-the-job training*

Rural Australians are more likely to be part time or casual workers and more likely to work in small businesses. Both these characteristics are associated with a lower time and expenditure on on- and off-the-job training. Training activity over a six month period in 1993 averaged 4.1 hours per employee for small employers (one to 19 employees) compared to 5.5 for employers of 100 or more (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1994).

### *Training providers*

Government provided VET education and training was delivered at 1646 locations (including community centres) and by 397 private providers in 1996 (NCVER 1997). Most training in 1996 was provided by TAFE institutions, of which slightly more than half were in non-metropolitan areas. However many rural Australians do not have ready access to TAFE Institutions (Harrison, 1997).

### *Industry training plans*

Industry VET training plans recognise that regional and community involvement in planning must be fostered. Most industries with a large presence in non-metropolitan Australia have strategies for flexible delivery to address the training needs of rural and remote workers and enterprises. (Australian National Training Authority, 1997).

### Summary of context of non-metropolitan Australia

Non-metropolitan Australia is diverse in terms of population density, educational experiences of the population, occupation and industries for employment. In addition to the issues associated with the vast distances between where some Australians live and large population centres where most

educational infrastructure exists, there are other differences between metropolitan and non-metropolitan Australia. Rural people are less likely to have post-school qualifications, participate in post-school education and training (especially personal enrichment programs), be an employee, be a professional and work in manufacturing, property and business services or finance and insurance. They are more likely to have left school early, be unemployed or out of the labour force, work in small business, be a self-employed or an employer, be a labourer or other low skilled occupation and work in agriculture, forestry and fishing, mining, construction or tourism.

## Methodology

We searched VOCED, Australian Education Index, AUSTROM and OLEARN databases. This was supplemented by recent reports and conference proceedings held by the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia and contact with researchers and policy makers with an interest in non-metropolitan VET. The scope of our search was Australian research articles and reports since 1990.

The search of the VOCED database yielded the largest number of relevant research articles and reports. A search for 'research' revealed 1319 entries, of which some were overseas items and some pre 1990. Around half of the remainder appeared to be described as 'first hand' reports of research projects. We scanned the abstracts of these, and found only a tiny proportion (47) which either explicitly stated they used data from outside metropolitan areas, or may have used non-metropolitan data. The overall number of items considered is around 70 (some of which are still to be incorporated).

### Framework

We devised the following framework for considering the issues:

- access, equity and participation,
- curriculum, delivery and assessment,
- training outcomes.

Within each of the three categories we identified issues relating to:

- individuals,
- location, and
- the system.

The publication which results from this project will be structured according to our framework, but for this workshop, we have selected our 'top seven' issues. Some of these issues have been researched sufficiently for us to say that there is a differential impact. Others need more research before we can be certain that there is a different impact. The remainder of the issues are in our 'top seven' because the characteristics of non-metropolitan Australia suggest there is likely

to be a differential impact, but there is little or no research to confirm our suspicions. We have not referenced particular issues to individual pieces of research in this paper, although references, of course, will be included in our final document. The material we have referred to to date is included as a Bibliography at the end of this paper.

Our seven issues are: local involvement in planning, thin markets, cost of training and measurement of cost and effectiveness, flexible delivery, no tradition of VET or history of valuing education, quality and availability of trainers and assessors, and community sustainability, social capital and the value of VET to communities.

We look forward to your comments!

## Issue 1: Local involvement in planning

- Local needs and culture, diversity within regional Australia
- Courses not always relevant
- Information dissemination should be improved

The education and training needs of non-metropolitan Australia differ from region to region. The needs of remote locations are very different from those of larger rural centres. There is typically less diversity of demand within a single non-metropolitan area than within a metropolitan centre, for example. In many cases, broader skills are required for a job because specialists are less readily available; for example consider the local garage mechanic who must be able to work with all makes of cars, trucks and farm machinery.

Regional/local planning is better able to take account of the different demographic patterns in the various regions, and regional/local cultural differences. National industry standards do not always cater for the broad range of skills required for rural jobs. External training providers do not always understand local culture and needs, and many courses provided are not relevant to local needs. Adult and Community Education (ACE) has been successful because of its regional funding and administration; ACE is aware of local variations which state and national systems overlook.

Poor participation in post-compulsory education is often due to poor dissemination of information about programs to employers, potential students, and parents. Rural employers need more effective consultation with training providers. A 'visible' local contact point is desirable. Removal of training providers to distant centres results in distancing the providers from the community in regard to decision making and consultation. Local rural training committees or 'brokers' can facilitate interactions between training providers and rural communities. There are many models available.

## Issue 2: Thin markets

- Lack of variety and diversity of offerings
- Lack of work placements
- Low bargaining power, reduced tailoring of courses, less real choice of provider

Small population centres often lead to classes not running because they are not large enough to fund. This reduces the choice available to non-metropolitan students, and is likely to be a reason smaller proportion enrolled in personal enrichment programs compared to metropolitan centres.

The lack of diversity of industry in individual locations limits the range of work placements for initial VET, especially VET in schools. The capacity of the predominant small business sector to host trainees is limited by economic factors and business training infrastructure, and further reduces work placements. A declining skilled workforce decreases opportunities for training. With the move of businesses away from small communities and closure of branches, workplace training and assessment opportunities are reduced as skilled people who are potential workplace trainers move away.

Small, scattered rural and remote businesses lack bargaining power when procuring training from providers. They lack understanding of issues of quality and do not always understand the system. There is reduced tailoring of courses for particular businesses compared to large metropolitan employers.

There are few employers large enough in non-metropolitan Australia to have the necessary infrastructure to deliver a balance of enterprise specific and general competencies. Therefore most employers need to draw upon external providers for all their VET needs. Small private providers in rural and remote areas can be deterred by the high infrastructure costs imposed by accreditation and competitive tendering. When combined with pressure on public providers, this may result in a decline in the number of visible local training providers.

## Issue 3: Cost of training, measurement of cost and effectiveness

- Smaller class sizes
- Travel cost and time, insufficient replacement workers
- Application of uniform policy and performance measures across Australia

Class sizes are smaller in smaller population centres. This means higher costs per student/contact hour, as is demonstrated by the high cost of VET per hour in Tasmania and the Northern Territory where all centres are relatively small. Costs of assessment are higher, especially in remote locations.

Students who travel to distant centres for education and training face greater transport and accommodation costs, and a spend more time on travel. This reduces the incentive to participate, especially for the existing workforce. A paucity of replacement workers compounds the disadvantage faced by the existing workforce, particularly for small businesses and the self-employed.

Resource allocation and performance indicators for VET do not fully recognise the infrastructure and development cost of flexible delivery. Existing outcome measures are not always appropriate, for example they do not account for the slower completion times of rural flexible delivery students. Treatment of fixed costs in face-to-face and flexible delivery is also an issue. Teacher/trainer employment terms and conditions do not adequately take into account the tasks required by flexible delivery. VET funding policy should address access and equity because of the greater cost of delivering education and training in rural Australia.

## Issue 4: Flexible delivery

- IT & AT cost, provision technical and support
- What will make flexible delivery effective in rural and remote locations?
- Why aren't successful delivery models being applied?
- Cost and quality of flexible materials

The growth of information and communications technology and advanced technology (IT & AT) will increase the access of education and training for people in non-metropolitan Australia. There are some things that can be done to enhance the opportunities for participation in VET in non-metropolitan Australia that will be generated by IT & AT.

IT & AT per se does not overcome all access barriers. IT & AT has its own set of barriers which relate to cost and physical provision of the equipment and infrastructure, training of teachers and students to maximise the benefits of technology and issues of individual learning styles. There is a paucity of training opportunities on use of IT & AT for rural people, and lack of accessible technical support. Not all students adapt well to the independent learning usually required by flexible delivery, including IT & AT.

As learning is enhanced by participant interaction, there is a need to consider the incorporation of some face-to-face component, or mentoring in flexibly delivered programs, whether they be print or technology based. Appropriate and successful training models for rural and remote locations have been developed and need to be heeded, for example itinerant teachers, mobile facilities.

More cooperation between providers is needed to maximise resources for the production of high quality materials, including Web sites.

## Issue 5: No tradition of VET or history of valuing education

- Tradition is of nonformal training and experiential learning
- Low confidence as learners and consumers of VET
- Dominance of small business not well organised to access VET funding
- Change takes longer to impact (e.g. policy changes)

There is not a tradition of formal vocational education and training in rural Australia. With the exception of mining, the industries which dominate non-metropolitan Australia do not have a tradition of formal VET. However, there is a long tradition of nonformal training through agricultural extension. Learning by doing is valued, but many do not recognise that they have skills acquired through experiential learning. Little immediate demand for workplace assessment in agriculture reflects the lack of training culture in the industry. There is a need to recognise the value of the informal learning which occurs in rural communities, and recognise it as a pathway to VET.

A larger proportion of the non-metropolitan population is employed in small business compared to metropolitan Australia. Small businesses employees are less likely to participate in formal VET, a fact which may or may not be linked to lower skill levels in small business jobs. Many business and families have no confidence in their ability to be informed and effective as 'consumers' of VET.

Low self confidence as a learner is widespread, and is related to previous negative experiences of schooling and low education levels. Adult and community education and providers such as SkillShare are important in providing bridging programs in rural communities, including literacy and numeracy programs. Lower average educational levels suggest that low self confidence as a learner could be more prevalent in non-metropolitan Australia, although it is likely that the impact will not be uniform across non-metropolitan Australia.

Frequent changes to the national VET system are difficult to keep up with and apply in businesses and communities which do not have a culture of education and training.

## Issue 6: Quality and availability of trainers and assessors

- Skills for adult educators and trainers
- Difficulties in attracting and retaining quality adult educators, trainers and assessors

Those working in rural and remote locations require a broader range of skills than in metropolitan areas to cope with flexible delivery, and a more diverse

teaching load. There is a need for professional development, especially as few adult educators in remote locations that hold formal qualifications in adult education. Professional development would help overcome staff resistance to the changes required for flexible delivery. There is a need for more trained assessors. A peer support system among remote area educators may improve quality and retention of staff.

Trainers need to understand clients' existing skills and their needs in order to be credible; metropolitan trainers and providers coming into rural and remote areas often lack this understanding.

Insecurity of the training market makes acquisition and retention of quality of teaching staff difficult in rural areas. Difficulties faced by trainers in remote locations are: isolation, professional loneliness, poor resources and facilities.

## Issue 7: Community sustainability, social capital and the value of VET to communities

- Quality providers can enhance the social capital of non-metropolitan communities
- Is the value of VET higher in small communities?

Quality private providers who act in partnership with the local industries and community are responsive and so generate more effective outcomes in terms of relevant programs. They contribute to community sustainability. Rural and remote communities value the local presence of TAFE campuses as a type of 'social capital' which contributes to the sustainability of the community in the form of population and infrastructure.

It is likely that the lower educational and skill base in rural and remote Australia means the marginal impact of vocational education and training programs is greater than in metropolitan areas.

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